

REVIEW

'Duff'-initely funny

Film's characters digress from typical high school stereotypes



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Teen high school movies have been setting the tone for how "the best years of your life" are supposed to operate for quite a while now.

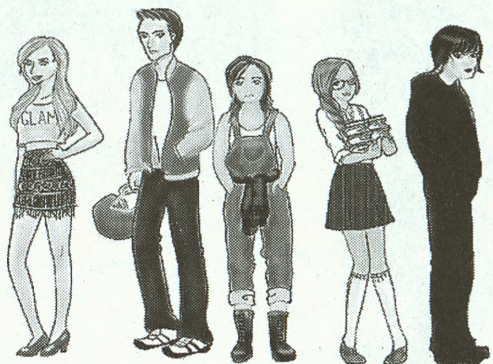
You can take your pick of the movies that have filled our adolescent years ("A Cinderella Story," "Pretty In Pink," "10 Things I Hate About You," "The Breakfast Club," "Grease," "She's All That," "Easy A," "Mean Girls," "Sixteen Candles"), and it's still difficult to overlook the fact that each had at least some influence in preparing us for what high school would be like — and maybe raising our expectations a little too high.

These movies taught us that high school social order was black and white — there were the jocks, the nerds, the popular kids, the losers, the goths, the musicians, the stoners — and

that the people in these groups were easy to recognize. However, once 9th grade rolled around, it turned out things were not so simple.

Enter "The Duff," a movie about a high school girl, Bianca (Mae Whitman), who is informed by her childhood guy friend Wesley (Robbie Amell) that she is the "Designated Ugly Fat Friend" and embarks on a mission, with the help of Wesley, to un-duff herself.

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AWARDS CONTINUED

over \$500 thousand dollars December 2014 to make the "Back to the Future" skateboard and other technologies like self-driving google cars made their silver screen debut decades ago.

Additionally, a large part of engineering has gone into addressing film production challenges over the last century, such as the 'Dolly cam' in 1907 and the 'Steady cam' in 1976.

From Chroma key compositing — better known as the 'GreenScreen' technology — in the 1930's to today's outdoor motion capture technology, these scientific advancements have not only helped bring a storyteller's imagination to life but also gone on to develop tech gadgets for the general public,

such as the "Color Predictor," an iTunes app that helps filmmakers predict the interaction of lights, camera and a photographed object.

Any discussion on the technological aspects of the movie making business is incomplete without talking about CGI — bread and butter for many of the blockbuster studio movies today.

"At the beginning there were maybe four or five directors who really pursued this emerging trend of computer graphics," said Ergun Akleman, a professor at the department of visualization at A&M, whose students have gone on to work for companies such as PIXAR or startup digital rendering businesses like Splutterfish. "These people own CG companies that generate the visual effects you see in their films. George Lucas, Peter Jackson, James Cameron, they have pushed this industry to a new level."

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How Will We Stop Iran?

Iran's global jihad seizes new ground, fortified by an obsessive quest for nuclear arms. Negotiations are failing. Do we need tougher sanctions?

Iran's Islamic fundamentalist leaders are sworn by their nation's constitution to pursue world conquest through jihad. Through global terror campaigns, Iran has already achieved dominance in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen. It openly threatens to destroy Israel. Despite decades of Western-imposed trade embargos and sanctions, as well as recent U.S.-led negotiations, Iran's drive to amass nuclear arms continues unabated. And its leaders vow not to give up their quest. What more must the U.S. and the world do to stop Iran's apocalyptic nuclear threat?

What are the facts?

Iran is by far the world's most aggressive perpetrator of terrorist acts. It provides direct funding and leadership to Islamic terror groups Hizbollah, Hamas, Houthi rebels in Yemen, and Shiite militias in Iraq, as well as the ruthless Assad regime in Syria. The Islamic republic also has been tied to bloody attacks on civilians in nations as far flung as India, Thailand, Saudi Arabia and Bulgaria, as well as an attempted assassination of the Saudi Ambassador in Washington, DC. Iran was recently implicated in the 1994 bombing of a Jewish center in Argentina and a murderous cover-up attempt. But Iran's most belligerent threats have been directed at Israel, which Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei vows to "annihilate."

Iran's terrorist tactics are motivated by its drive to become the dominant power in the Middle East. The Shiite ideology of Iran's leaders commands Muslims to wage global jihad, and their constitution commits them to "the establishment of a universal holy government and the downfall of all others." So far Iran's strategy has been successful, as its controlling influence now spreads over Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and most recently Yemen. More critically, Iran has an effective chokehold over the Gulf of Hormuz, through which much of the world's oil travels.

No wonder most of the world's nations, especially Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt, are horrified at the prospect of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. In fact, a nuclear Iran threatens the worldwide balance of power, particularly in the inflammable Middle East. For Israel, a nuclear-armed Iran poses an imminent threat to its very existence.

Unfortunately, the West, and particularly the United States, must share the blame for allowing Iran to increase its hegemony and acquire nuclear weapons capability. The U.S. pulled out of Lebanon in 1983 after an Iranian-engineered bomb killed 241 Marines, facilitating the rise of Shiite Hizbollah terrorists. When the U.S. pulled out of Iraq in 2011, Iran stepped in, seizing control of Shiite militias and exerting decisive influence on the Iraqi government. Syria's President

Since sanctions brought the Iranians to the table, sanctions are the most powerful, peaceful means for convincing them to abandon plans to acquire nuclear weapons. But because the Iranians continue to declare themselves implacably committed to nuclear development, it's time to ratchet up economic pressure. The Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act should be passed now. The survival of the world is at stake.

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FLAME

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Bashar Assad, roiled in a bloody civil war, has essentially become a proxy for Iran, and the Houthis, who just violently took control of former U.S. ally Yemen, are also on Iran's payroll. While the U.S. has designated Iran a state sponsor of terrorism and instituted a trade embargo in 1995, the Islamic republic's warlike acts against the U.S., Israel and many other nations have only increased. To halt Iran's nuclear weapons development, the West imposed sanctions in 2006, but Iran's centrifuges continue to spin defiantly.

Despite intense recent negotiations between the U.S. and Iran to reach a peaceful resolution, several deadlines for settlement have passed, and Iran still refuses to cease nuclear weapons development. Indeed, recent investigations indicate that Iran has already violated existing agreements by establishing secret nuclear supply networks. Iran's President Hassan Rouhani boasts, "Of course we bypass the sanctions, and we take pride in it." No wonder a majority of the U.S. Congress urgently supports harsh new sanctions on Iran unless it immediately agrees to give up weapons-grade nuclear enrichment and ballistic missile programs. President Obama, however, promises to veto any such measure, arguing that increased sanction threats will frighten the Iranians from further negotiations.

What is the solution? Most Americans share the President's hopes that Iran can be persuaded to set aside its nuclear ambitions—and its vendetta against Israel—through diplomacy. But one thing is certain: Iran is our enemy. Appeasement will not work. It is only crippling Western economic sanctions, backed by the threat of force, that have driven Iran to the negotiating table.

Above all, Iran must decommission its nuclear weapons infrastructure now. To this end, Senators Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Senator Mark Kirk (R-IL) have introduced the Nuclear Weapons Free Iran Act of 2015, which toughens sanctions if Iran refuses to comply, thus strengthening the U.S. hand in forging an agreement that peacefully eliminates the Iranian nuclear threat.

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ACROSS
1 Place for pants loops
6 Hat edge
10 Two-year olds
14 Islam's Almighty
15 ___ Raton, FL
16 Skin-cream ingredient
17 Artillery outburst
18 Soccer score
19 Underground coal source
20 They're raked in the fall
23 Lowly chess piece
38 "According to an old adage . . ."
42 Aladdin's hat
43 "I'd hate to break up ___"
44 Lounges around
45 Short golf stroke
47 "French" dog
48 Stadium level
50 Poisonous snakes
53 Changes the color of
54 Fruity ice-cream treats
57 Letters like PDQ
58 Swampy ground
59 "Yeah"
63 Casino city near Tahoe
64 Creative notion
65 Lasso loop

DOWN
1 Used to be
2 Pie ___ mode
3 Not feeling well
4 Georgia port
5 ___ shalt not steal
6 Air rifle
7 Kitchen and den
8 Impatient cry
9 Retail complex
10 "Hot" Mexican dish
11 Martini gamish
12 Musical notes
13 Catches sight of

66 Raised, as cattle to be jolly . . .
22 Cobful of corn
23 Seasoned rice dish
24 Stand up
25 Dance in 3/4 time
29 Figure-skating surface
31 Possess
33 Get rid of
34 Drain-cleaner chemical
35 Inedible, as old bread
36 Southern gal
37 Donkeys
39 Occupied a chair
40 Day- (fluorescent paint)
41 Compliment to a golfer
45 Chinese-dinner veggie
46 Large coffee brewer
47 Tire-pressure measure: Abbr.
48 Stun gun
49 Totally silly
51 Shopping binge
52 Say "not guilty," maybe
54 Unkind comment
55 In the center of
56 ___ fish sandwich
60 "In what way?"
61 Nation north of Mex.
62 Opposite of "his"

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